

Questions and Responses from the Climate Action Planning Town Hall, May 2022

HERC & Waste Related Questions

1. Your 2011 Climate Action Plan included carbon offsets for sending trash to the HERC incinerator downtown. This incinerator affects North Minneapolis disproportionately which is a large reason why this primarily black/brown/low-income community has the highest asthma rate in the state. How will you ensure your plan is taking the health of these communities into account? Will you commit to removing the HERC from your plan?
 - a. [Municipal solid waste \(MSW\) disposal and specifically the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center \(HERC\) in downtown Minneapolis was not accounted for in the 2011 Climate Action Plan, but was included in the Twin Cities' campus 2008 greenhouse gas inventory, which was included as an appendix to the Climate Action Plan. In order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other pollution associated with MSW, the University is taking steps to collect more material for recycling and composting, which reduces the amount of material sent to HERC. Recently, actions include \[implementing organics for composting collection\]\(#\) in waste stations around campus, educating the University community on \[how to hold zero waste events\]\(#\), and providing \[summer storage for students\]\(#\) to reduce waste associated with moving out of housing.](#)
2. What would be your response to other professors (particularly environmental engineering) who teach their students that trash incinerators such as the HERC are a positive and viable method of waste management?
 - a. [Minnesota Statute](#) establishes a waste management hierarchy. The statute promotes waste management practices in the following order of preference: reduction, reuse, recycling, composting/organic recycling, incineration/waste to energy, landfill with methane recovery, and landfill.
3. What are your thoughts on trash incinerators such as the Hennepin Energy recovery center being posted as a “solution” to the waste crisis?
 - a. [The University's waste recovery program uses the waste management hierarchy defined in Minnesota Statute. The statute promotes waste management practices in the following order of preference: reduction, reuse, recycling, composting/organic recycling, incineration/waste to energy, landfill with methane recovery, and landfill. The University continuously works to manage more campus waste through reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting/organic recycling.](#)
4. Will UMN remove the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center from the 2023 Climate Action Plan?

- a. The University's current emissions inventory and 2011 Climate Action Plan does not address emissions from waste disposal. The Committee will discuss whether to include emissions from waste disposal in the upcoming climate action plan.
 5. How does the action plan account for the harms of environmental injustice, like from the HERC incinerator?
 - a. Environmental justice is anticipated to be part of the planning process. The specific approach is yet to be determined.
 6. Will waste incineration be considered a carbon offset in the new climate action plan?
 - a. We have not determined whether emissions from waste disposal will be covered in the upcoming climate action plan. This will be part of the Committee's deliberations.
 7. A lot of recyclables are thrown in the waste stream. Due to cross contamination could more training be done with respect to that?
 - a. We are continuously working to identify and test different strategies to improve the outcomes of the University's waste program. Training can have a positive impact in some circumstances when paired with other actions.
 8. How can the University of Minnesota better support its workers to properly fulfill the U's promises for sustainable waste management?
 - a. The University currently provides equipment and regular training to custodians and other staff involved in waste management to support sustainable outcomes. Staff are encouraged to submit specific ideas for improving these resources to their supervisors or the custodial and recycling program managers.
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Academic & Student Related Questions

9. How is the common core curriculum preparing all grads for green jobs? Not just STEM jobs but in humanities business education, etc.
 - a. The University is reviewing the Core Curriculum standards currently and is accepting input on how the Core Curriculum should be revised. More information on this effort and a feedback form is available at <https://provost.umn.edu/initiatives/core-curriculum-2025>
10. Outside of those students in sciences programs, how would you go about advocating students of other disciplines on this issue? How do we integrate this positive change into society?
 - a. At UMN we strive to create a campus culture of sustainability. Our hope is that all students, regardless of major or program are engaged with sustainability in their daily lives. We push this forward by sharing information and resources with our

students through tabling events, orientation programming, in-class presentations, communications and more. We hope to reach all students through our engagement strategy and meet them where they are currently. We are working to ensure that our student body understands that climate change impacts all of us and that sustainability is everyone's work.

Regarding positive change in society, consistent with the University of Minnesota's outreach mission we engage the broader community through Extension, partnerships, and Public Engagement programs. Some examples:

- i. [Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships](#), a program of University Extension, brings together community and University knowledge and resources to drive sustainability.
- ii. The [Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership](#) supports climate resilience actions and collaborations across sectors and levels of government.
- iii. The University hosts the [Midwest Climate Adaptation Science Center](#), which supports management and protection of land, water, and natural resources with actionable climate science, innovation, and decision support tools.

The [Public Engagement Footprint](#) identifies additional University initiatives, partnerships, and programs that are fostering positive change. We plan to incorporate these types of outreach and engagement support as part of the Climate Action Plan.

11. As most climate-related classes are not obligatory, what is being done to encourage students who are "non-believers" when it comes to climate change to encourage them to learn more and not just ignore messaging?
 - a. At the University of Minnesota we strive to create a campus culture of sustainability. Our hope is that all students, regardless of major or program, are engaged with sustainability in their daily lives. We push this forward by sharing information and resources with our students through tabling events, orientation programming, in class presentations, communications and more. We hope to reach all students through our engagement strategy and meet them where they are at currently. We are working to ensure that our student body understands that climate change impacts all of us and that sustainability is everyone's work. One aspect of the Climate Action Plan will be considering academic programs available for students. This will be considered as part of the Climate Action Plan and can also be considered as part of the core curriculum review and potential revision concurrently led by the Provost's Office.

Justice & Equity Related Questions

12. What specifically are you doing to make sure that this climate action plan considers the well being of environmental justice communities in the Twin Cities?
 - a. Environmental justice is anticipated to be part of the planning process. The specific approach is yet to be determined.
 13. How do you plan to make things equitable going forward when not everyone has a seat at the table and the systems are heavily unjust?
 - a. Addressing equity within the climate action plan is anticipated to be part of the planning process. The specific approach is yet to be determined.
 14. How are indigenous, particularly Dakota and Anishinaabe perspectives, being represented on the committee?
 - a. As we move forward with the Climate Action Planning process we plan to bring in additional perspectives to consult on the process and provide valuable feedback. These additional perspectives will very likely include indigenous leaders.
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Healthcare Related Questions

15. How have you managed to connect healthcare to sustainability? What have been the challenges? What has been successful?
 - a. Numerous health sciences faculty have been working to connect healthcare, climate change, and sustainability. See the Climate Health Action Program and the Climate Change and Health Curriculum for more information on some of these efforts.
<https://med.umn.edu/dom/research/programs-centers/climate-health-action-program> and <https://globalhealthcenter.umn.edu/climate-change-and-health-curriculum>
 16. Campus medical facilities are waste and resource intensive. Will MHealth Fairview be included in campus sustainability goals?
 - a. Most MHealth Fairview facilities will not be in the scope of the University's climate action plan, but M Health Fairview facilities that receive services from campus units and energy systems may incidentally benefit from any changes the University makes that reduce emissions. The [Climate Health Action Program](#) has been working with M Health Fairview to address climate change.
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Green Training Related Questions

17. Does the Sustainability Committee support the creation of a Green Training Fund for the frontline workers that would help with composting and energy conservation education?

- a. The University is aware of the green training fund proposal at the Minnesota legislature. The University currently provides training for staff involved in composting and energy conservation. Staff are encouraged to submit specific ideas for improving these training resources to their supervisors or the custodial and recycling program managers.
18. Are you aware of HR4539 Bill at the capitol which will create a green training fund at the University? Do you support the fund?
- a. The University is aware of the green training fund proposal at the Minnesota Legislature and [provided feedback](#) on the proposed bill to the House Higher Education Committee during the legislative session. The University currently provides training for staff involved in composting and energy conservation. Staff are encouraged to submit specific ideas for improving these training resources to their supervisors or the custodial and recycling program managers.
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Public Engagement Related Questions

19. Why does the Climate Action Plan committee not include representation from the Teamsters, AFSCME, and other labor unions that represent thousands of workers on campus?
- a. A call for nominations to the Twin Cities Sustainability Committee was issued April 2021 and committee members were selected from the submitted nominations. The Twin Cities Sustainability Committee is composed of faculty, staff from a variety of departments, and students from all levels of study. This committee was intentionally formed to bring together a diverse group of voices and perspectives from across our campus. As we move forward with the climate action planning process we plan to bring in additional perspectives to consult on the process and provide input. These additional perspectives will very likely include members of our UMN community, including labor represented employees.
20. Are the UMN workers on the committee? If not, what perspectives do you think you are missing for this collaboration? Can you commit to bringing more workers + students in?
- a. The Twin Cities Sustainability Committee is composed of faculty, staff from a variety of departments, and students from all levels of study. This committee was intentionally formed to bring together a diverse group of voices and perspectives from across our campus. As we move forward with the climate action planning process we plan to bring in additional perspectives to consult on the process and provide valuable feedback. These additional perspectives will very likely include members of our UMN community along with external community members, local officials, and Indigenous leaders.

21. How can the Committee provide more transparency for other university members to have access to the data and process you are using?
- a. Throughout this climate action planning process our committee plans to engage our campus community early and often. The Town Hall was the first event of many to offer transparency, inform our community on progress, and hear valued feedback. Interested community members can sign up for our email listserv to receive regular updates and information about any upcoming events. It is a top priority of the committee to engage with the University community and ensure that their voices are heard. For more information and to sign up for updates visit z.umn.edu/tcsustcommittee
22. How do we make sustainability more convenient and affordable for students? Also, how do we partner with governmental entities to make policies in favor of sustainable potentially even subsidizing sustainable practices?
- a. A recent example of work to make sustainability more convenient and affordable for students is the development of the universal transit pass that is expected to launch this fall. We welcome other suggestions and ideas on how to make sustainability more convenient and affordable for students.
- The University has partnered with other organizations to advocate for sustainability at the Minnesota Legislature, to provide information to legislators to inform bills and statutes, and to support local elected officials in their sustainability efforts.
23. How do you persuade the apathetic, discouraged, or those who personally benefit from current systems into caring about this critical issue?
- a. Oftentimes it is most beneficial to meet people where they are and figure out where their personal interests and values lie. Successful communication often requires understanding your audience and where they are coming from. Everyone will be impacted by climate change in one way or another. It is important to be able to convey that message with understanding and empathy. Feeling apathetic or discouraged is an understandable response to a crisis. Communication that focuses on solutions and positivity will be more effective than doom and gloom. When communicating with populations who benefit from our current system it is important to decipher how the climate crisis will affect them personally and begin there.
24. How much is the U investing in climate action planning and preparedness? How do you hope to empower students to participate more in climate action/hold the U accountable?
- a. The University has identified resources to support expenses related to the planning process. Throughout the process, we will work to engage often with

student government, student groups, and individual students to empower students and bring their voices into the process.

Other Questions

25. How has remote work impacted the U's emissions? Have employees taken on these emissions or has there been a net reduction?
 - a. The move to more remote work in response to the pandemic reduced emissions in some categories, while increasing others. As an example, in response to the pandemic we increased the air change rate, or how frequently we exchange the air in a building with fresh air from outside the building, and added local HEPA filtration units. These actions increased the amount of energy consumption and therefore increased emissions. We are currently compiling the campus' fiscal year 2020 - 2021 greenhouse gas inventory, which should begin to highlight the net effects on emissions of remote work.

26. How will the climate action planning process consider the funding necessary to accomplish sustainability goals?
 - a. The process will address financial aspects of implementing the plan. The specific approach is yet to be determined.

27. Consumption is a driver in climate impact. What is the U doing to reduce consumption in its operation and staff's personal choices?
 - a. The University's *It All Adds Up* campaign encourages actions that reduce consumption. In addition, a number of University initiatives like the ReUse Program and the Energy Management energy conservation program work to reduce consumption related to operating the campus.

28. What are you doing to make the UMN land and landcare more sustainable? There are too many high-maintenance lawns that could be at least replaced with pollinator lawns, which are better for biodiversity, water conservation and reducing CO2 emissions?
 - a. Over the past several years, University Landcare has identified and implemented more naturalistic landscapes (e.g. rain gardens, pollinator gardens, no-mow lawns, etc.) on-campus. Examples include the West Bank Urban Meadow, the no-mow lawn between the river and Shevlin Hall, and the prairie planting between Rapson and Shepherd Labs. Landcare continues to identify opportunities for more of these conversions. Often, conversion from turf to naturalistic landscapes requires more labor, inputs, and cost.

29. Line 3 is pumping far sands 011 through the state and our waterways. What will the U of M do to hold itself and the state of Minnesota accountable in combating emissions from the fossil fuel industry?

- a. From 2008 - 2020 the University's Twin Cities campus lowered greenhouse gas emissions 51% by reducing our consumption of fossil fuels. The upcoming climate action plan will build on this work continuing to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. The University is also actively pursuing research, and providing teaching and outreach services that will enable the State of Minnesota to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels.

30. In order to address the issue of the high energy use of heating, have you considered cool climate air source Heat Pump (ASHP). There are incredibly efficient methods of heating and cooling.
 - a. We have been exploring a number of technologies, including heat pumps, to serve heating needs and have implemented pilots in some instances. How to serve heating needs without creating emissions and developing a plan for zero emissions heating will be a primary focus of the climate action plan.

31. What barriers do you see as the most urgent for us at the University to address to reduce our Climate impact collectively?
 - a. Our largest source of emissions is from the combustion of fossil fuels to generate steam for heating and various processes, like equipment sterilization. Given our cold climate and how some of our older buildings were constructed, the transition from fossil fuel based heating to a no/low emissions heating source may be costly and disruptive to the campus. Identifying how to address this transition is one of the greater challenges and will be a key focus for the climate action planning process. This transition is also one that all residents and businesses in the State of Minnesota will need to make, so the lessons we learn and the solutions we develop can be a model for society at large.

The next largest categories of emissions are commuting and air travel. Each member of the University community has a role to play in helping reduce and eliminate emissions in these areas.

32. University workers are not provided bus or transit passes to make that an affordable option. Would that be something that could be helpful?
 - a. Public transit is a more sustainable transportation mode compared to single occupancy vehicles, and results in lower greenhouse gas emissions. We will evaluate the idea of providing transit passes as part of the climate action planning process.

33. I'm interested more specifically about plans to implement these ideas on campus/how we will update our plan. What are the most important aspects of environmental damages will the U be prioritizing?
 - a. The Climate Action Plan will be a key input into a future Energy and Utility Infrastructure Plan, the University's 6 year capital plan, the annual capital budget, and other University and departmental level implementation plans. The climate

action plan will prioritize greenhouse gas emissions mitigation and climate adaptation.